

Eric Law, *Finding Intimacy in a World of Fear* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007), 104 pp.

In this short and accessible volume, Eric Law addresses one of the great cultural and spiritual challenges of our time—how to faithfully respond to the messages of fear that we daily receive from our political leaders, the evening news, advertising, and other sources. He systematically analyzes the fear messages we receive, probes those messages for their root source, and suggests that facing our fears in an honest way can be a source for authentic and relevant ministry. His book calls us back to our covenant relationship with God as the center of our lives, against which our fears are negotiated.

Law critiques the U.S. government's responses to the events of September 11, 2001, claiming that our leaders manipulated our fears to serve their own agendas. A fascinating element of this critique is his observation about our country's use of ritual in dealing with our fear. He cites the example of the color-coded threat level system created by the Department of Homeland Security. Law claims that these rituals give us the illusion of control but do not encourage us to address the existential vulnerabilities that are at the root of our fear. One of the most creative aspects of this book is Law's own offering of an alternative color-coded system aimed to foster relationships and communities where our fears might honestly be addressed. Communities of faith attempting to live in counter-cultural ways might find interesting promise in this schema.

While the book is not a traditional theological text, Law does open up themes of idolatry, ultimate concern, covenant, and community. This book could be a good conversation starter among groups of faithful persons seeking to trust God in the midst of frightening times. I did find his concept of God a bit confusing (but whose isn't?) in that at times he describes God as someone to be feared, and at other times offers a model of God as a "best friend" who helps us through the vulnerable times in our lives.

This book would be a helpful reminder to religious leaders as they attempt to keep their preaching and writing on course with the most fundamental claims of their faith. A strength of the book is that Law explicates how diving into the very center of our fears can be a rich resource for ministry.

At the same time, the book is a quick read and would be accessible to laity. The author relies heavily on anecdotes from his personal and professional life to support his argument. It would be helpful for small groups to read together and discuss. It could be a nice Lenten study and would even lend itself to a retreat format. Additionally, readers interested in the role of ritual in community life will find much food for thought in this book. Eric Law is a clear-eyed cultural observer, and he is able to make very helpful connections between our present cultural realities and the ministry to which we aspire.

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